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Mavrozacharakis, Emmanouil; Tzagkarakis, Stylianos Ioannis; Kotroyannos, Dimitrios

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Mavrozacharakis, E., Tzagkarakis, S. I., & Kotroyannos, D. (2017). Mediterranean Left-Wing Populism: The Case of SYRIZA. *European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities*, 6(2), 40-53. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-51465-9>

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Mediterranean Left-Wing Populism: The Case of SYRIZA¹

Emmanouil Mavrozacharakis, Dimitrios Kotroyannos and Stylianos I. Tzagkarakis
Centre for Human Rights (KEADIK), Department of Political Science
University of Crete, Greece

Date of submission: January 27th, 2017

Date of acceptance: April 18th, 2017

Abstract

Until recently the increasing impact of the right-wing populist parties in Europe was quite impressive. Several of these parties gained significant electoral power but expediently they collapsed while others were consecrated electorally. With SYRIZA's electoral victory in Greece, the emergence of PODEMOS in Spain and of the Five Star Movement in Italy - which includes several aspects of a left-wing populism - and the coalition between social-democrats and radical left in Portugal, the creation of a peculiar left populism has been evolved, especially in the Mediterranean part of Europe. High electoral percentages and consequently, their involvement in government through partisan organization professionalism and charismatic leadership, are main characteristics of these parties. Another crucial factor, regardless of their ideological roots, is the anti-European rhetoric, even if it existed only for some period in the past. For instance, SYRIZA in Greece, intensely criticized the present European structure but at the same time promised that Greece will remain to the EU and the Eurozone. Furthermore, it appeared as a political entity that promised, with a demagogic way, to overcome the obvious principle of state continuation, by denying to implement the agreement that the previous governments have signed with Greece's partners. Eventually, this promise was converted into a trap as left-wing SYRIZA in government, was finally succumbed to the strong demand for adherence and implementation of all the previous agreements. Thus, SYRIZA failed both ideologically and practically. Apart from the diverse ideological and political illusions that characterize this type of populism, another characteristic is the deficit in specific policy substance. This deficit has been transformed into a large gap in terms of strategic program priorities and options. Thus, it turns out that SYRIZA's rise to power was based on versatility and on a high degree of classless ideological ambiguity. Obviously, this fact is contrary to SYRIZA's past "left political verbosity" that considered Greek people as a single collective alliance against specific financial and political international obligations. Therefore, SYRIZA represents a new specialty of Greek and Mediterranean populism that requires deeper investigation.

Keywords: populism, austerity, crisis, political propaganda



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¹ The initial version of this paper had been presented to the 4th Edition of the ECPAM'2015 Conference, University of Bucharest, Romania, with the title "Utopian Left-Wing Expectations and the Social Consequences of the 3rd Memorandum in Greece" and was co-authored by: Dimitrios Kotroyannos, Stylianos Ioannis Tzagkarakis, Emmanouil Mavrozacharakis, Apostolos Kamekis and Kostas A. Lavdas.

Corresponding Author: Dimitrios Kotroyannos, Professor of Political Philosophy, Director of the Centre for Human Rights (KEADIK)
Affiliation: Department of Political Science, University of Crete
Address: Gallos Campus, 74100 Rethymno, Crete, Greece
e-mail: kotroyannos@uoc.gr

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European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities - EQPAM, Volume 6, No.2, April 2017, pp. 40-54.
ISSN 2285 – 4916
ISSN-L 2285 – 4916

1. Introduction

The global financial crisis has seriously affected political ideologies in Europe and as a result, the percentages of the populist parties have impressively raised (Nicoli, 2014: 6-7). On the one hand, there has been a dramatic increase in the influence of several far-right parties and on the other, there was a significant increase in left parties' percentages in several countries. Specifically, the spectacular rise to power of the left SYRIZA in Greece, the rapid electoral growth of PODEMOS in Spain, the evolvement of the Movement of Five Stars in Italy - which used left arguments in several occasions - and the alliance between Social Democrats and left parties in Portugal are some of the most significant examples. It turns out, that in South Europe, a new peculiar leftist populism, which stands against austerity and demands redistributive policies, without necessarily the existence of the required economic conditions in this direction, has been recently evolved.

In other words, in the midst of the economic crisis in southern Europe, left populism has been in a direct increase. The pressure of mass unemployment, poverty, disappointment for politics and the fear of the future, offered more than ever, lucrative ground for a policy characterized by simplified slogans, emotions and fuelled resentments. Specifically, left parties such as SYRIZA and PODEMOS took advantage of the growing social discontent by propagating themselves as the mouthpiece of ordinary people and the concerns of their fears, as the expression of resistance against retrenchment of social values. Specifically, as an opposition party, SYRIZA was both against European integration and supported that Greece should not withdraw from the Eurozone. This strategy eventually evolved into a trap. Currently, the manifested anti-memorandum SYRIZA of Alexis Tsipras agreed with the Eurozone partners and lenders to implement one of the harshest austerity programs. At the same time though, and with a strong populist manner, Tsipras government attempts to distance itself from the verbal content of the austerity measures it has negotiated and voted. The new SYRIZA government relieve communicatively that it has the ability to move flexibly within a tight framework.

In reality though, SYRIZA not only failed to fulfil its campaign promises but also to implement even a part of its core ideological principles. Moreover, the left unwittingly turned to realism as its anti-memorandum negotiating strategies were totally failed. However, electorally, the leading group of SYRIZA is still able to extract the majority of social acceptance despite the implementation of the new memorandum. This fact just proves the effectiveness of populism that Tsipras government uses. The road that led to the final compromise of SYRIZA government with lenders was marked by the symbolic production of politics in the sense that a continuous hard negotiation scenario with the partners was raised, as a "race-till-you-drop" to avoid the memorandum. Similarly, the left government after signing the Memorandum, tried to cultivate the impression that it will do everything to normalize its social effects. The radical fury with which SYRIZA demonized the memorandum and everyone who was involved in its managements in Greece and abroad, while the party was in opposition (Petras, 2015), was followed during its first governmental period.

The abovementioned strategy facilitated SYRIZA in its final shift without losing large parts of social legitimization (Misik, 2015). With the elaborate display of a "radical confrontational intent", they managed to quench both internal party dissidence and voters, whose majority was against the Memorandum (Misik, 2015). The already grounded in reality electorate was convinced by the looming inevitable U-turn of SYRIZA and gave to it another chance to stay in power. Explicitly, September 2015 elections legitimized the radical mutation of SYRIZA. Specifically, the distinction of the phenomenon of SYRIZA lies in the complete reversal of memoranda policies and the conciliation management rhetoric with lenders. Apart from the diverse ideological and political illusions that characterize this type of populism, an additional

feature is the large deficit in specific policy contents. This deficit is reflected in a large gap regarding programmatic priorities and strategic choices.

All the above-mentioned characteristics refer to the fact that the rise of SYRIZA in power was based on the versatility and therefore, on a high degree of ideological ambiguity. Thus, no direct real class commitments exist, in the sense of externalized commitments. This fact obviously is in contrast with the “left political verbosity” of SYRIZA who raised the “Greek people” into a single collective alliance against specific financial policies and international obligations of Greece (Mezzadra and Negri, 2015).

2. SYRIZA and the Formation of a Peculiar Left Populism

2. 1. Deduction of divisions and of the post-dictatorship consensus

SYRIZA has emerged to power through a combination of circumstances, which suddenly and without mediating adaptation period, caged Greece in a sovereign debt crisis. A significant cause for the emergence of this crisis was the implementation of specific irresponsible and irrational policies from major parties, after the restoration of democracy (1974). Such policies created a large but ineffective public sector that was not capable to resolve social problems and provide social cohesion.

Historically, the state in Greece embodies only superficially the concept of financial rationality and balance of public expenditure and incomings, while the parties in power represented the essence of benefits-offering, in order to obtain public trust. The citizens have reasonably invested in receiving benefits (by voting the party which promises to offer more) in an attempt to avoid unpleasant policy measures. The ruling parties hid the real political, economic and financial imperatives, which even in latent form, have accumulated and created an existential danger for the country. The structural deficit of the Greek state is characterized by “bureaucratic inertia, lack of policy innovation and clientelist commitments” (Lavdas, 2015: 3). At the same time the “legislative deadlocks have largely prevented the crisis from becoming also a window of opportunity” (Lavdas, 2015: 3). It is true that Greece, after the restoration of democracy, for almost forty years experienced a sham prosperity based on imaginary obsessions, consciously cultivated by the leaders of political and economic elite. However, since the time that an ultimate deadlock appeared, revealing the temporal illusions and the need to change the financial structure, enormous changes emerged on the political system and the entire political culture was transformed. In the beginning of the crisis, the social democratic PASOK encountered the challenge to lift the burden of fiscal adjustment. In 2010, PASOK of George Papandreou took over the responsibility to implement austerity policies through the implementation of a memorandum of understanding, in order to avoid the bankruptcy of Greece. The subsequent electoral collapse of PASOK, transferred the challenge to the right-wing ND (New Democracy) to manage austerity policies. The consequent of implementing such policies and having to confront a populist opposition, was the electoral defeats in 2015 (in national elections of January and September and in the referendum of July)

Parties such as SYRIZA, ANEL (Independent Greeks) and Golden Dawn took advantage of the growing social discontent, propagating with ease their selves as exponent of ordinary people and of their concerns, fears and of the resistance against avoidable outsell of public values. Especially, SYRIZA cultivated to the people a deep feeling of aversion towards political elites, the EU, the German government and the employers in general. In other words, in the midst of the economic crisis, populism and its respective multipliers were dramatically increased. The pressure of unemployment, the new poverty, rage against the political system and the fear of social collapse, offered more than ever, lucrative ground for a policy that worked with simplistic slogans, reinforcing aggressive feelings, prejudices and resentments.

Summarizing, on the one hand, main factors of the rise of the left in power in Greece were a) the existence of chronic structural political and economic weaknesses and b) the inability of the foregoing bourgeois governments to promote the necessary reforms with real social provisions in terms of creating a modern rule of law and an effective welfare state with universal and fiscal tolerated social services. On the other hand, the austerity programs of the European institutions and the International Monetary Fund (the Troika) are also responsible as they left no financial space for diminishing the social impact. It should also been noted that the Troika showed an “apparent lack of specialized and applied knowledge of the Greek case” that was “combined with the occasional indifference to domestic nuances and sensibilities. Being oblivious to social longer-term reform, different players within the Troika demonstrated at different times various degrees of inadequacy. One of the most urgent tasks back in 2010-2012 should have been a combination of deregulation, privatization and re-regulation, in order to combat oligopolies and increase competition in domestic markets. It did not happen” (Lavdas, 2015: 3-4)

At the same time, the alliance between the radical Right and the radical Left (SYRIZA-ANEL) produces an acceptable and charming by the masses ambiguity between the left and right populism and the determination of their political values. The need for polarization with the emerging enemy lead the Left not only in making unsubstantial promises but also in the rhetoric usage of violence and the use of extreme policy methods, which is a trend that has previously been identified by Habermas (1968, 5, 15; 1969, 149-152)

As a result, discrete deterministic values of political forces, particularly in the vital financial field, were diminished during the crisis, as it was identified by Noelle-Neuman (1998, 317-334). Noelle-Neumann has distinguished as leftist values the perseverance in state planning and public control and as right the perseverance in the private sector and economic competition. The Left conceptualize freedom as the liberation from poverty, expressing the need for public social protection and solidarity. In contrast, the Right approach freedom primarily as the freedom from state intervention and coercion. The crisis era in Greece reversed the value divisions due to the fact that the state was used in order to implement a redistribution from bottom to top.

In conclusion, the challenge of economic crisis management affected the values of almost all the political fields in Greece. With the rise of SYRIZA in power the conditions which the traditional bourgeois parties maintained in power were finally overturned. From 2008 onwards, the sudden elimination of those terms and conditions which reproduced the established cliental consensus of modern democracy in Greece, amid a broad distribution of benefits, privileges and powers, gradually led to a populist radicalization of the masses under the auspices of the left SYRIZA. The populist slogan of “hope” that was expressed by the Greek left charmed the majority of citizens.

2.2 Drawing the main characteristics of SYRIZA's populism

According to Müller (2015a) the overall attitude of SYRIZA cannot be simply described as irrational because it essentially follows an objective which is ultimately based on a specific strategy. This strategy is influenced by Laclau (1935-2014) who gave populism a positive dimension for the Left. Specifically, Laclau (2005) studied the policies of Peron in Argentina and concluded that a successful left project must have some specific aspects of populism. This means that those diverse demands and expectations of citizens which can no longer be addressed properly by the liberal state must be addressed by the Left in a direction against the interests of the ruling elite. Ideally, this process can form a unified nation against internal and external enemies. On the one hand, there is a symbolic representation of the people as a unified and coherent entity against the enemies and on the other, the representation of the elites as a homogenous caste. In Laclau's (2005) view “the dichotomy of the social field between privileged and underprivileged

serve as a key feature of populism either from the Left or the Right of the political spectrum". Populists call the disadvantaged for enlisting even outside the boundaries of institutional normality and claim their support in order to subvert the existing political system. In the concept of "the people", according to this logic, only the non-privileged section of the society, which bears the "ultimate virtue" and is not liable for any misfortune, is included. The enemy - friend figure, as once introduced by Schmitt (1932), revives a strange bipolar composition. On the one hand, there are the nation, the people, the underprivileged, our own, and on the other, the enemies of the nation, immigrants, foreigners, the privileged, the moneylenders. The complex dipole is followed by a strong willingness of institutional obsolescence, which ultimately legitimizes lawlessness. According to Laclau (2005), populism historically tends to prevail "when a large number of social and economic demands accumulates, which cannot be satisfied within the existing institutional system".

Because populism is always addressed to the disadvantaged, any political program aimed at empowering marginalized social groups contains a certain extent of populism. Furthermore, Laclau (2005) believes that "in every political system, two standard political processes exist. In the first, which is defined as populist, there is a widespread mobilization of masses based on the 'equivalence logic'. In the second, which is defined as institutional, individual demands of specific social groups are dominant, which are implemented selectively by policy practitioners, based on a logic of difference". In every political system, these two processes coexist, but in different proportions. According to Laclau (2005), the first example was expressed in Greece during the widespread redistribution period of Andreas Papandreu government (during the 1980s) while the second during the modernization period of Costas Simitis government (1996-2004). The first is a populist and the second is an institutional pole but the predominance of one of them do not necessarily eliminate the other.

Under the analysis expressed by Laclau (2005), SYRIZA's populism is not simply interpreted as an irresponsible fiscal and economic policy, but literally comprises an attempt of a new "training" of the people or in the words of Laclau, "as a project to establish a new political hegemony" in Greece. Accordingly, it is the road to the new political leadership that inevitably leads to a conflict with internal and external enemies of the people. The "enemy-friend" contrast, for the composition of the people as a coherent collective subject, is also used by Mouffe (2015), who considers that the aggressive populism of the Left comprises a necessary precondition for the overthrow of the political status quo to a progressive direction. Mouffe (2015) also expects that the conflict of the future will be between the Left and Right populism and in this direction the left must be prepared to utilize the populist dimension of democracy which requires the establishment of a coherent public.

In Mouffe's (2015) view, in most European countries there is a "populist situation", in a sense that, dynamic democratic politics can no longer be limited to the traditional axis of opposition between Right and Left. As for Laclau (2005) so for Mouffe (2015), the dimension of education is crucial. The factor of "the people", in this sense, is a category under construction. The challenge today is the creation of a progressive common intention (the people) through the formulation of all democratic demands in an equivalent chain (Mouffe, 2015). However, the insurmountable remaining problem in this direction is the definition of "the people" and their main characteristics. Clearly, there is a problem of identity (who they are or not and how they are) and the problem of the number (how many) (Katsoulis, 2004: 338).

According to Mouffe (2015), the unity of the people is created not as in the case of right populism, through the exclusion of specific social groups or immigrants, but through the determination of an enemy who lies in the political and economic forces that express neoliberalism². The conflict between these kinds

² For more details on the concept of neoliberalism as it is used here, see: Harvey (2005).

of populism can easily be explained by the creation of simple enemy images and by the promotion of different forms of radicalization. The strategy of creating enemy images in order to unify the people, as analyzed by Laclau (2005) and Mouffe (2015), goes back to the political philosophy of Schmitt (1932) who considered the distinction between friend and enemy as a basic concept of the political theory.

The strategy of creating enemy images as collective entities, collided with each other by placing the individual in front of the dilemma to enter one or the other side, was extensively used by SYRIZA. This strategic trend is externalized during the week of the referendum in July 2015, in which SYRIZA was presented as the exclusive representative of Greek people highlighting the heroic struggle for survival against the rest of Europe. At the same time, the rhetoric about internal and external enemies appeared. The entire political discourse was moralized, a trend which, according to Müller (2015b), comprises real populism. Amid such a rhetoric, a heterogeneous patchwork of political forces expressing SYRIZA was consolidated. The problem, however, is that this form of populism does not solve the domestic social problems nor the structural problems of the Eurozone, in the sense that Eurozone does not function through national consents which are democratically detached on specific issues in order to transfer pressure to other partners.

Beyond the dimensions set by Laclau and Mouffe, SYRIZA's populism was emerged also according to the criteria set by Frank Decker and Cas Mudde. According to Decker (2006), populism is a strong stand against the status quo, it appeals to lower social groups and it is a phenomenon of social crises of modernization, in the sense that there is a systemic review in nearly every form of economic, cultural and political development, using simplified shapes and models of analysis. In a similar approach, Mudde (2004: 544) explains populism "as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people".

In other words, a key feature of populism is the Manichean method of addressing the problems and history at a black and white way of thinking. The party of SYRIZA expresses such rhetoric in a relative intense form. According to that method, diversity, complexity, relativism, uncertainty, doubt, pluralism and rationality should not exist. The speech is sharp and violent, devastating, blatant and addressed to the collective "we". In particular, stereotypes and views of traditional roles are used in order to achieve the maximum impact on a significant part of the population which feel insecure.

In the case of the left and right-wing coalition between SYRIZA and ANEL (Independent Greeks), we can distinguish three interdependent features of populism, as Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) sets them. These are a) primitivism (a weakened form of nationalism), b) autarchy and c) popular sovereignty. Right-wing populists such as ANEL, often invoke the overthrow of popular sovereignty in order to accentuate the catalytic effect of migration, while leftist populists such as SYRIZA, constantly emphasize on the dissolution of the nation-state as a consequence of the memorandum (imposed by the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission). In fact, both kind of populisms cultivate a myth, as stated by Ignatieff (2013). According to him "sovereignty is a political concept which means just to be the master of your house. The tragedy of modern state sovereignty is that currently, there is not any country in the world that is absolutely sovereign in this sense. All societies, all sovereign states, face the ultimate rise of globalization and the political importance of the global economic crisis is to be realized how vulnerable are all states, as market forces can destroy the legitimacy of national political systems without exception".

The coalition government between SYRIZA and ANEL behaves in terms of an "opposition front" that grows out through strong denunciation of the implementing policies of the past. As Canovan (1999: 2) proposes "populism in modern democratic societies can be described as an invocation to the 'people'

versus the existing power structure and the prevailing attitudes and values of society". Moreover, it should not be overlooked that SYRIZA, already before the rise to power, went through a process of social democratic transformation and only then it was able to attract the middle classes. On the other hand, it attracted the lower social groups through the usage of the "social liberation" of the Greeks and the restoration of democratic conditions in the country as central slogans.

As Oberkofler (2015) summarizes, the new Left in Greece represents a revitalized social democratic adult aunt, who became a carrier of hope for the poor and those in the risk of poverty and only with the promise of normalization of the austerity policy of Brussels. The new European Left is possibly trying to replace, as a new chimera of hope, the social democratic parties. In this sense, the phenomenon of SYRIZA represents for several scholars, a positive approach of populism as expressed by Laclau (2005) or even by Beyme (2010). According to Beyme (2010), populism does not only include negative effects for representative democracy, but also it includes the advantage to highlight issues on the political agenda which are usually avoided by the elites. Furthermore, even traditional political parties use populist practices and thus, it is implied that it is impossible to define clearly the boundary between a populist and a democratic party (Beyme, 2010: 203).

SYRIZA's officials have actually mentioned issues which had not sufficiently been addressed by bourgeois power parties, such as the new social issue, the confrontation of poverty, the necessity of a debt haircut and the incorporation of a growth clause on repayment debt terms. Even if SYRIZA's proposals for debt impairment and austerity termination through renegotiation with lenders, seemed irrational and impossible, they fascinated a large part of the electorate in all social groups. Promises themselves could hardly be tarnished even if they were characterized as populist. The crucial point, however, where the real populism of SYRIZA lies, is the fact that the negotiating power of the new government has not been revealed by the dramatic unemployment increase in Greece but due to a series of positive sections and reforms launched by previous governments. These reforms gave the opportunity for real economic adjustment of the Greek national economy by reducing the primary deficit from 10, 5% of the GDP to a primary surplus as well as by the conversion of the negative external balance into positive.

Relatively to the abovementioned, Hillmann (1994: 680) indicates that "charming actions and greater social justice promises raise the level of attractiveness of promises not to impose higher taxes". Surely, SYRIZA brought about almost all the social demands that have arisen during the period of the economic crisis. But what SYRIZA underestimated and systematically concealed was the question of funding and thus, of feasibility.

The populism of SYRIZA can be interpreted as a synthesis between an imaginative dissident attitude and an unhurried technocracy. Such a composition has managed to create a significant number of problems for the traditional European bargaining system, which is based on the search of consents (Hartleb, 2015). According to Hartleb (2015), SYRIZA expressed a Machiavellism of the 21st century, as it is a heterogeneous coalition of the radical Left with a strong communist wing, which used all methods of demagogic populism, surpassing even the right-wing populists. But SYRIZA managed to render the traditional parties and the corruption system, responsible for the Greek misery. This success is certainly not compatible with the promises SYRIZA offered for a socialist policy of selective benefits without austerity, with supplementary grants to the poor and with abolition of taxes on the middle and low social groups. Moreover, the paradoxical governmental alliance of SYRIZA with right-wing ANEL, which was constituted after the 2015 elections, is not based on common ideological principles but on the basis of rage against the EU and the leadership of Angela Merkel. Besides, a characteristic of populism is that the ideology and the lack of principles comprise a permanent programmatic contrast.

According to Martens (2015), the electoral rise of SYRIZA is a result of the mass transfer of voters from the social democratic PASOK. Martens believe that SYRIZA was benefited rather than the Communist Party (KKE) because the latter intends to lead Greece out of the Euro and the EU, an adventure that Greeks preferred to avoid. On the contrary, SYRIZA is rhetorically radical against austerity policies, but explicitly argued against a possible country's exit from the Eurozone. However, the fact that the policy of SYRIZA brought the country at the edge of the bankruptcy and the exit from the Eurozone is a contrast that does not seem to bother SYRIZA's proponents. Neither Tsipras himself seems to be bothered by the inconsistency of his promises. As Prime Minister, Tsipras promised aggressive negotiations with the country's lenders which have resulted in an even more painful compromise. Furthermore, the policy of SYRIZA corresponds to a primitive Keynesianism which supports that the economy will automatically grow after the increase of wages. Therefore, the government of SYRIZA intended to cancel all agreements signed by the previous governments, to strengthen the rights of labor unions and increase state revenues by increasing the maximum tax rate. At the same time, it considered as obvious, the financing continuation of Greece from other EU countries. Clearly and practically, these positions are incompatible.

2.3. Common characteristics with far-right

During the crisis there was a widespread impression of proximity of SYRIZA with the majority of the people. This attitude approaches both the potential of equality and solidarity, which are integral part of the Left, however, it includes some attitudes that several far-right parties share. The Greek case illustrates the paradox of relative convergence between left and right political populism in the sense that globalization, European integration, the EU and its institutions, the Troika and Germany, are identified as a common enemy while the Greek people, Russia, China, Venezuela the BRICS and any other who will potentially support the debt disengagement of the country debt and its obligations, is identified as a common ally.

As Roubini observes (2015), far-right and far-left parties that are constantly rising their power share common denominators in economic policy as long as they express a model of illiberal state capitalism. Such common denominators can be an agenda against the EU, free trade, foreign direct investment and focus on domestic workers and companies (Roubini, 2015). This type of left and right populism can be expanded due to the increase of economic problems, which is transformed into permanent austerity. High unemployment, growing inequality and poverty, lack of opportunities, the danger of joblessness and income loss, are factors which have increased populism in an unprecedented scale.

Hostility towards the market and the fear that globalization and liberal capitalism would erode national identity and integrity, characterizes both SYRIZA and several far-right parties. Xenophobia combined with nationalism are constitutive elements of the political process in Greece and in one way or another, they prevent from the possibility of gaining mutual benefits through interaction and cooperation with other countries (Pappas, 2015: 38). Xenophobia can be distinguished from the preference in conspiratorial interpretations and from a defensive approach of international affairs while nationalism is distinguished by the emphasis on the primacy over other nations, as a result of the influence of the ancient Greek heritage, the Orthodox Christian tradition and the Greek language. In this context, the world is divided through a Manichean manner, into philhellenes and Greek-haters and the congruency with other "aggrieved people", such as the Kurds and the Serbs, spreads (Pappas, 2015: 38). The prevailing atmosphere of the crisis as a synthesis between tough fiscal measures, existential fear in front of the potential loss of social status, xenophobia, europhobia, nationalism, has deliberately cultivated myths in a collective delusion and formed a political ground that favored the cooperation between left and extreme right in Greece.

According to Pelinka (2015), the alliance between right and left populism was originally in latent form until reaching a real coalition government. A common ideological denominator of this alliance between right-wing and left-wing populists, which extends across Europe, is the rivalry towards European integration. Alliances between right-wing extremists, who no longer appear as neo-fascists, and leftist extremists, such as SYRIZA, who no longer appear as traditional communists but as leftist populists, are usual in Europe but in Greece it is the first time that such a phenomenon is expressed through the formation of a coalition government which could be imitated in other countries. In fact the coalition government in Greece is a clear indication that the extremes of the political spectrum can agree with each other under a bunch of populist demands which are drastically erected by society (Schwennicke, 2015). On the other hand, SYRIZA's populism differs from the far-right in terms of the attitude towards immigrants and overall, the issue of cultural diversity. However, its populism contains a profound conservatism which is expressed with an opposition towards innovation, public sector reforms and rationalization of the public sector. This is a type of conservatism which is common to the far-right and left. It turns out that the right and left populists in Greece gained momentum and came out as winners from the crisis of legitimacy of the EU and the representative democracy. Therefore, it is not a surprise that in the first electoral victory of SYRIZA in January 2015, the most satisfied party in Europe was the French far-right (Front National) (Winkler, 2015). In this case, a common reference point is the struggle for de-legitimization of the current European construction.

2.4 The ignorance of the international context

As the main opposition party, SYRIZA had expressed the necessity to confront the humanitarian crisis that has been arisen as a result of the austerity imposed by the implementation of the memoranda. This choice, deliberately or not, ignored the pressing European and international context that still demands the implementation of policies of fiscal retrenchment. These pressures can often be characterized as obvious as long as they comprise the main part of the implementation of the previous agreements. Ignoring the deficient power of a small and weak country such as Greece to alter or modify the rules of international trading and underestimating the inherent country's internal weaknesses, as expressed in its problematic economy, Tsipras government attempted to threaten "the strong, the local oligarchs, international bankers and also Germany" (Mazower, 2015). According to Offe (2015), the negotiating strategy of SYRIZA contained from its beginning, the high risk of a possible refusal from the lenders which would have caused devastating consequences both for Greece and for Europe. Finally, Tsipras was driven eyes in isolation. An alliance of the weaker countries of the euro was not possible while Tsipras failed to impose to them anything that was included in his pre-electoral agenda. Negotiations were driven into a fruitless blame game of 18 against 1 (Offe, 2015).

At the level of applied policies, the abovementioned "naivety" was expressed by the fact that SYRIZA government demanded from the European institutions to start negotiations for the Greek problem in the highest level as a means to resolve it politically. This request essentially legalized completely an informal and irregular council, in cooperation with the Brussels Group, to function as a governmental intermediary channel. As a consequence, a proposal was prepared that was even harsher than the ones that technocratic Troika had prepared in the past. This new form of governance currently includes Angela Merkel and François Hollande, Christine Lagarde from the IMF, Mario Draghi from ECB, the president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker and it was supplemented occasionally by other heads of state and institutional representatives. Atypical intergovernmental bodies of this type substitute in several cases the formal institutional structures of Europe in crisis management.

The result is obviously not compatible with the virtual presence of SYRIZA's leadership in the Greek and the international public sphere as a heroic revolutionary party expressing the hope that maybe could bring a decisive percussion against the international capital (Mazower, 2015). The imaginative leadership of SYRIZA includes the illusion that Greece could abolish at once the austerity regime without suffering tragic consequences.

What the Greek Left never perceived was that modern European capitalism has chosen which policy paradigm will follow. However, the necessary changes have not yet been largely noticed in Greece. Europe has opted for a model of competition based on reduced labor costs, increased institutional efficiency and reduced the former lengthy parliamentary procedures for the benefit of a more central political management from Brussels. This kind of management was provided by the fiscal pact that imposes to all Member States to maintain balanced public budgets and establishes strict surveillance. All these obey, in the name of economic governance, a model that aims to broaden Europe's competitiveness against China and the emerging economies and were largely underestimated by SYRIZA leadership.

2.5. A policy of conflicting promises

Given that it was not long until the overweening hopes of repealing austerity were substituted by expectations for counter measures, it is clear that the pre-election promise of SYRIZA to negotiate a fairer deal that would soften the terms of hard austerity imposed via Memoranda was limited by a second promise of remaining inside the Eurozone and the EU. At this point, the strategic of mutual promises which is a core part of populism, clearly appears.

Therefore, when Tsipras government was forced to sign an even tougher new Memorandum amid the threat of Grexit and the collapse of its banking system, it had created a certain legitimacy field that was prepared through adversative promises. This choice was interpreted by some as a betrayal, suggesting that there was a viable alternative based on direct exit from the euro (Grexit) which government ought to follow. Besides, several inside SYRIZA overlooked that political conditions that would make viable a direct Grexit, simply do not exist today and therefore, those who cultivated the impression that the political conditions emerged from the "no" in the referendum will facilitate the euro exit process, are not honest (Gindin and Panitsch, 2015). However, given that the discussion on Grexit as well as other unconstructive and dangerous beliefs, have found lucrative ground on SYRIZA, once it came to power not only its strategic gap was clear but also the ideological and political impasse was obvious as it was trapped between the leftist voluntarism and the requirements of modern governance. The government focused on its populist mobilization, by interposing concepts such as honor, dignity, prestige and sovereignty and the opposite concepts such as betrayal and humiliation rather than proceed with a plan to reform the corrupt tax administration and the state (Offe, 2015). The type of SYRIZA populism combines the objective of popular sovereignty and a sense of national pride, with the request for social justice within the policy framework of the Eurozone which specifically requires the opposite i.e. the relevance of national sovereignty for the sake of supranational entity, as well as the priority on fiscal stability over social policy and redistributive policies.

With these incompatible expectations SYRIZA managed to overcome the marginalized and sectarian Left which was doomed to electoral defeats as it was incapable to attract the middle groups. In particular the case of SYRIZA in Greece, as well as the case of PODEMOS in Spain, indicate that even in the European left there is a dynamic to approach the Center, a feature that until recently seemed to be monopolized by the European social democracy (Schwartz and Schwartz, 2007). In any case, the leftist SYRIZA convincingly expressed the demand for social reconstruction even if this was connected with unsubstantiated promises. The condemnation of austerity policies and memoranda was clearly associated with SYRIZA.

It turns out that the left-wing government is now trapped by one in the needs of the Greek society, which now robustly demands the implementation of the pre-electoral commitments, and the pressures for implementing the budgetary and financial requirements. Under these conditions the cultivated pre-electoral expectations are now in a process of inhibition. Obviously the left government is not able to effectively confront neither the increasing social problems nor the debt issue. In this concept, Walzer (2015) observes that SYRIZA came to power with the promise to fight against bankers and the EU officials, in order to end the austerity policies and progressively reform Greece. But actually, SYRIZA did not have effective plans and a governmental program for the country in order to fight rampant corruption, to address the Greek oligarchs or to improve the collection of taxes and to reform public administration. Anderson (2015) considers that the rise of SYRIZA in power was due to the fiery rhetoric to end the domination of the Troika. In this sense the demagogic rhetoric of SYRIZA for “popular sovereignty” from the starting point does not correspond to the harsh reality. Finally, Tsipras accepted that fiscal policy in Greece is totally dependent on the whims of the “institutions” of the EU. If we observe the strategy of SYRIZA we will come to the conclusion that the “achievement of the pre-electoral campaign was a ‘tour de force’ of lies and demagoguery that causes nausea” (Fischer, 2015).

2.6. The inability to govern

The observations above, reveal a serious structural governmental deficit of SYRIZA that prompted the famous German philosopher Habermas (2015) to point out that the paradoxical strategy and tactics of the Greek government of SYRIZA may be partly interpreted by the inability of its political staff. In this sense, SYRIZA is unable to convince its partners that it would faithfully implement the necessary reconstruction of the state and the economy, fight corruption and tax evasion, and instead confines itself to moralization through a blame game which, under the present circumstances, sets the German government in an advantageous position. Habermas (2015) criticizes the Greek government because it makes difficult, even for those who support it, to distinguish a certain realistic policy priority.

On the other hand, SYRIZA has failed to effectively provide to the society those public goods (such as the creation of new job vacancies and the social safety net provision) that had promised as the main opposition party and therefore, slipped in a crisis of legitimacy. This argument is obviously linked with the lack of a reliable program of public services provision and a structured plan for managing public expenditures and strengthening demand. The present coalition in Greece is trapped in the anachronistic implementation of increase in cuts and taxes. This strategy is not possible, along with the inability to resolve the structural problems in the labor market and the resistance in every reform, to bring positive socio-economic results.

Clearly, SYRIZA did not seem to comprise an alternative for resolving some of the most significant problems of the country and foster democracy. However, SYRIZA had treated democracy only as an ideal but not as a functioning democratic model (Roy, 2009), in the sense of a proposal for the aversion of old, bankrupt models and a shift to the implementation of specific necessary structural adjustments that will foster both transparency and democracy.

2.7. SYRIZA as a melting pot of political realism

Despite a relative social acceptance during the first year of SYRIZA in power, it turns out that it has failed at creating a political hegemony after the respective “left fixations” on debt relief, on Greece as a debt colony and on cancellation and renegotiation of the Memorandum, have totally defeated. The Left in Greece has won the elections but was ideologically defeated. Indeed, SYRIZA managed the impossible.

Voting SYRIZA in September 2015 national elections, citizens actually accepted the new memorandum of fiscal adjustment. Actually, the elections sealed the choice of the realistic path. The political propaganda of SYRIZA functioned as a political melting pot which created wider social consensus on the basis of a gradual acceptance of austerity measures.

Therefore, the re-election of SYRIZA caused much less concern to the European partners and the IMF. Despite the current deteriorating economic and political situation in Greece during SYRIZA governance, the political opinion, which determined the electoral attitudes, was affected by the repulsion towards “old” political parties. This was the factor that SYRIZA managed to use in order to gain social acceptance and win the elections. Its main strategy was to create a diversion between the pro-memorandum parties (“old” or bourgeois parties) and the anti-memorandum parties (mainly populists). This was exactly the distinction between “old” and “new”.

However, after the “U-turn” and the acceptance of the implementation of the third memorandum, Tsipras will have to achieve the connection of two completely opposing commitments. Firstly, the government is committed to implement the terms of lenders but at the same time it should flatten the social crisis. The memorandum includes 86 billion to be given in Greece with the precondition to implement harsh austerity measures. At the same time, Tsipras government has no other choice but to implement the reforms which he agreed with lenders. Anything else leads back into bankruptcy scenarios. Certainly, the impact of the new austerity measures will be directly connected in the future with Tsipras and his party as long as it will not have the public support for the implementation of the reforms.

3. Conclusions

Generally, contemporary populism in Greece transformed a part of the society to an irrational mass which lacks orientation, while awakened expectations that are not feasible in budgetary terms. This happened because the populist parties targeted their propaganda, during economic crisis, to those sections of the population who have lost a significant part of their prosperity and social security. Under these circumstances, a primitive nationalism was unfolded and many Greeks adopted an illusion of resistance against a nonexistent occupier. A parallel result of this kind of nationalism was the intensification of hostility against Europe. Greece came close to the collapse of its European identity and SYRIZA had a high responsibility as long as, at a time of social contradictions sharpening, it cultivated with semblance, a social narcissism under its populist strategy.

The party of the Left took advantage of the social divisions and conflicts that emerged during the crisis and tried to attract both social groups with high education and training index that were marginalized and those with less education and training. Though conflicting groups were put both under the umbrella of SYRIZA, in an attempt to construct a new political situation, the Left never answered the central question of an alternative if the renegotiation of austerity fails. Under these circumstances, the active political-ideological turn (U-turn) of the ruling party was inevitable and as a result, it signed the agreement for the implementation of a third Memorandum. This was a total defeat of the leftist ideologies on debt relief, debt colony and the cancellation and renegotiation of the memorandum. In other words, the Left in Greece won the elections but it was ideologically defeated. This is the price for its establishment in power. Indeed SYRIZA managed the impossible. By voting for them, citizens voted “yes” in the memorandum and austerity. In an inquisitive way the devotees of myths were converted into a body of political realism. The recent elections have sealed the choice of realistic logic. The memorandum is considered now inevitable by the majority of the Greek citizens. Thus, SYRIZA along with its political propaganda functioned as a political

melting pot which created broader social consensus on the basis of gradual acceptance of austerity measures, though putting in danger the economic and social stability.

Therefore, Tsipras will have to achieve the synthesis of two completely opposing needs. Firstly, his party should implement the terms agreed with the lenders and at the same time, defuse the social crisis in the country. This is something of a “self-negation” of the founding of the *raison d’être* [rationale] of SYRIZA (Fischer, 2015). Unlike PASOK, SYRIZA was developed through social protests that outraged Greece after 2008. Consequently, its voters expect far more from those that it can offer. Even if SYRIZA tries to build a hegemony such as that created by PASOK - based on patronage and favoritism – it does not have the resources to achieve it, not to mention that it lacks any ability to manage the austerity measures “in a more humanistic way”. The implementation of the hard budgetary cuts in the coming months, most likely will further divide the party (Fischer, 2015). As a concluding synthetic remark, it can be mentioned that SYRIZA’s populism comprises a synthesis of technocratic lack (Hartleb, 2015), unsubstantiated promises (Fischer, 2015; Anderson, 2015; Walzer, 2015; Müller, 2015), transcendental moralism (Offe, 2015; Müller, 2015), nationalism (Pelinka, 2015; Schwennicke, 2015; Pappas, 2015; Habermas, 2015), and managerial incompetence (Habermas, 2015).

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